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NONPROFIT MARKETING HISTORY SECTION

A Note on the History of the Marketing of Higher Education

Stanley C. Hollander
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ABSTRACT. This paper discusses how higher education institutions avowedly marketed themselves to various publics between the American Civil War and World War I. During this period, colleges became coeducational, and the land-grant, elective system was implemented. In and of itself, this represented a shift in product definition and in student target markets. Colleges avidly promoted themselves and sought publicity, researched advertising effectiveness, and positioned themselves relative to the competition on several criteria including price and course offerings.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing was long defined as the business activities involved in the flow of goods and services. That definition fell into disfavor

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since: (1) it did not recognize the marketing activities of nonprofit organizations such as, in the present instance, colleges and universities; (2) it ignored the product planning and merchandising side of marketing; and (3) the marketing professorate now wants to express its task in terms of exploring exchange relationships. Also, in studying higher educational product design, we must recognize, and perhaps welcome, the creative tension between market and production criteria. However, a definition of marketing as “those business-like activities that induce, facilitate, and/or stimulate exchanges between educational institutions and their publics” will well serve our purposes.

The very nature and conduct of a university involves much of what might be called “inherent” marketing. Students are gathered together, often in a residential setting, for a number of highly impressionable years. They must be given, and will develop for themselves, recreational activities that, when subsequently viewed through nostalgic eyes, will promote strong alumni attachments. The student years are marked by, and especially culminate in, impressive rituals that reinforce attachment. Under the elective system particularly, students and prospective students must be provided with course and curricula information, traditionally embodied in an impressive catalog that provides room for statements of missions and descriptions of activities.

Intercollegiate athletics have long been of interest to many who are not alumni. Faculty research must be communicated to relevant audiences. In many other ways, universities impact American society. Here we are concerned with self-conscious and avowed utilization of these and other marketing opportunities, particularly from the American Civil War to World War II.

We are not blazoning an untrodden trail. Other researchers (Cutlip 1970, 1971; Veysey 1980; Bingham 1988) have reported on postbellum marketing of higher education. The justification for our efforts is threefold. First, the reasonably accessible other writers have drawn primarily on educational literature and sources (university archives, institutional histories, and educational journals). We reinforce their work through the use of nineteenth and early twentieth century advertising trade materials, a business archive, and an available history of an advertising agency.

Second, in spite of detailed current work (e.g., Pollay 1985; Hollander 1986; and particularly Fullerton 1988), most marketing professors believe that modern marketing in general, and probably higher educational marketing in particular (e.g., Schmidt 1988), is a relatively new phenomenon. We offer a drop to help our predecessors erode the ahistorical bias and suggest that there are lessons in the past.

Third, we hope that our discussion will stimulate additional insights concerning the forces that shaped modern higher educational marketing.

One likely objection to the argument should be discussed immediately. Contemporary scholarship holds, with considerable justification, that marketing is something inclusive of, but “higher” and “greater” than the sum of its components. The “Marketing Concept,” the *mix* of promotion, product, price, and place, is often described as a post-World War II integration of the four components under a single directorate and with a consumer orientation. We believe that it can easily be demonstrated that the belief that pre-World War II enterprises allowed these functions to operate autonomously is erroneous (Fullerton 1988; Hollander 1986), but this is not the place to pursue that issue. With regard to higher education, Cutlip’s (1970, 1971) evidence indicates, although he does not make the marketing concept point, that strong presidents or college secretaries and/or bursars who reported directly to them made most of the noncurricula decisions and, in many institutions, probably also greatly influenced instruction. With regard to instruction, both formal and actual decision-making are divided in widely varying degrees between administration and faculty in modern colleges with, as mentioned before, a tension between what the decision makers believe students should be and want to be taught. The role and influence of contemporary college presidents is a hotly debated topic (Birnbaum 1989). We wonder if the tightly knit schools of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with their strong and highly goal-oriented presidents, were not closer approximations to the model “marketing concept enterprise” than their diffuse and decentralized contemporary counterparts. We will, for example, note how two nineteenth century universities, Northwestern and Valpari-

so, sporadically prided themselves on the use of business methods that included special attention to price or product.

AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

From 563 in 1870, the number of higher education institutions grew to about 1,000 in 1910 (enrolling one-third of a million students) and to about 1,500 in 1935 (with some one million students). The number of institutions grew to 2,000 in 1960 (with three million students) and to 2,500 in 1970 (with seven million students) (Boorstin 1973, p. 479). Table 1 provides the 18-24 year-old college participation rate at various times. Easily observable is the consistent decade by decade increase between 1870 and 1970.

Cutlip (1970, 1971) traced higher education publicity activities and called the period between 1900 and 1917 the "Seedbed Years" (1970, p. 22).

The emergence of the strong public university dependent upon taxpayer support in the latter part of the nineteenth century brought about with it increased concern about ways to build popular support for higher education. The land grant college and its extension programs provided a healthy stimulus in this direction. This increased competition for support, plus expanding needs, forced private colleges to set up their efforts in the 1890s.

The appearance of college marketing was in part a result of competition among publicly supported agencies for public favor

TABLE 1. College Participation Rate (18-24 Yrs. Old)

Year	Rate	Year	Rate
1870	1.1%	1930	7.2%
1880	1.6%	1940	9.1%
1890	1.8%	1950	14.2%
1900	2.3%	1960	22.3%
1910	2.9%	1970	32.1%
1920	4.7%		

and a share of a limited resource pool. Others have seen the rise of public education in America as a powerful democratization process (Boorstin 1973, p. 478-490). American and European notions of “higher education” diverged during the late nineteenth century. European universities were repositories for “professional education” in such fields as medicine, law, theology, and science. In many cases, admission decisions were made when the prospective student was ten years old. The German “gymnasium” offered trade education, which frequently ended at the age of fifteen. American colleges and universities, especially the land grant institutions, were founded on the idea of “the fulfillment of the individual” (Boorstin 1973, p. 480) and courses were designed to satisfy individual needs.

The efforts of Johnathon Baldwin Turner, educated in the classics at Yale during the 1820s, exemplify a philosophy that transformed American education.

To build a true democracy, Turner proclaimed, the industrial classes must also have their universities, at least one in each state. He noted with satisfaction that the recently begun Smithsonian Institution had begun to cultivate learning that was useful for the people, but it was only a beginning. The new universities would teach agriculture, manufacturing processes, and bookkeeping; they would provide experimental farms and orchards and herds of stock; and they would be “open to all classes of students above a fixed age, and for any length of time.” Commencement ceremonies would be marked not by a Latin oration, but by an annual fair, exhibiting the products of the experimental farms in competition with similar products gathered from the whole state. . . . Turner staged a series of educational revivalist meeting through-out the state to persuade the Illinois legislature to petition Congress for grants of federal lands to establish an industrial university in each state. In 1853, the Illinois legislature sent its request to Washington. (Boorstin 1973, p. 483)

Stephen A. Douglas in 1861 said that Turner’s land-grant plan was: “The most democratic scheme of education ever proposed to the mind of man!” (Boorstin, 1973, p. 487). In 1857, Justin S. Morrill wrote a federal land-grant bill that was vetoed by President

Buchanan because he felt that the states would return to the federal government for financial assistance. President Lincoln, however, signed a new act in 1862, again written by Morrill. A number of colleges and universities were “invigorated” by the Act, including private (e.g., the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rutgers, and Vermont College) and public schools (e.g., Florida, Missouri, and Michigan Agricultural Colleges) (Boorstin 1973, p. 485).

Coeducation was spurred forward by the Morrill Act. Oberlin College admitted men and women in 1837, resulting in a public scandal. A limited number of other schools followed, but the land-grant college concept of “a useful higher education for all,” free of the class divisions of Europe, was impetus enough for many colleges and universities to open their doors to women. As noted by Boorstin (1973, p. 488), “higher education was now believed to be every American’s right.”

The macromarket demand and support for higher education *in toto* thus now appears as “natural” and inevitable as the demand for automobiles, microwave ovens, and video recorders. Yet we know that even in those markets, individual competitors have always had to struggle for their potential share and that efforts to draw new or enlarged segments into the market have always required pervasive efforts. The style might differ in the case of higher education, but the objective would be similar. Neither finances nor the canons of respectability would permit a late nineteenth century, rural, denominational college to mount a high-powered media campaign. However, it clearly would be entitled to convince young parishioners in a reasonable geographic range (which probably included alumni) that they would be best off in a nearby school of their own faith.

We should note one problem with the democratization thesis as an explanation for the rise of college publicity. Cutlip (1970, 1971) draws many, although by no means all, of his examples of early publicity from the records of prestigious, non-democratized Ivy League and similar institutions. In fact, as Schmidt (1988) points out, these schools instituted recruitment policies to enforce ethnic and religious barriers. The current complaints of Asian-American students testifies to the present exclusivity of some of these higher educational institutions (*New York Times* 1989). In that sense, self-conscious publicization seems to have emerged from the top, rather

than from the lower (i.e., democratic) rungs of the higher education ladder.

Cutlip's choice of illustrations, however, may have been motivated by happenstance, personal interest, or probably the availability and accessibility of both primary and secondary data. In any event, he suggests that publicity and promotion helped those institutions differentiate themselves from the rising competition of other, more democratically induced schools. Also, the mass of materials assembled in the Warshaw collection at the National Museum of American History (WSC)¹ testifies to the ways in which many smaller and more parochial schools publicized themselves during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Supply Channel Considerations

Apparently nineteenth century high schools did not keep pace with the growth and democratization of higher education. This situation was called "upside down" by Boorstin (1973). Although there were some selective high schools in major cities, public secondary education throughout the country did not always meet the students' and colleges' needs. The elite colleges maintained close ties with selected prep schools from which they drew much of their student body. Many lesser-known colleges maintained their own preparatory divisions (WSC, Box 2).

We can hypothesize several reasons for these "captive prep schools." For small colleges, the additional students could have provided economies of scale in administration and subsistence. Faculty could have taught in both divisions as well. Outside of the land-grant universities and some other public institutions, much of the higher educational system was subject to varying degrees of religious denominational orientation and control. Parents who were scattered among a relatively low density population may have often found it difficult to obtain the desired denominational secondary education in their home community. Also, of course, the prep division fed students into the senior college.

Product Reformulation

Part of the democratization process was to reach out not only to a new strata in the youth cohort, but to reach out to them with new

educational products. In the second half of the nineteenth century, reform of higher education included widespread popularization of the elective system, with many more options than were available under the classical undergraduate approach. These options included vocational preparation for fields other than the traditional learned professions, vastly expanded interest in scientific agriculture, upgrading of teacher education from normal schools to pedagogical colleges, introduction of the social sciences, and the beginnings of formal business education. These innovations inevitably encountered criticism from conservative educators and resistance and questioning from potential students and their parents. The debate often focused on the study of “words,” representing a moral uplifting of the human mind, versus the study of “things,” representing a Philistine materialistic approach (Royce 1891). College catalogs and brochures (WSC) frequently carried explanations and justifications for these new programs, and undoubtedly much of the work of school representatives (whether officers or alumni) was to persuade potential donors and enrollees of their merits.

PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY

N. W. Ayer & Son

Advertising agencies such as N. W. Ayer & Son played a role in college and university promotion. Ayer founded one of America's earliest advertising agencies in 1869 (Hower 1949). Prior to entering the advertising business, he was a teacher. This in combination with deep religious convictions led him to view education as being important from a societal perspective. Ayer initially placed advertisements in eleven “popular” religious magazines. By 1871, his agency dealt with 234 publications, and revenue totaled some \$80,000. His firm handled advertisements for a number of educational institutions.

Another important part of the business was the advertising of educational institutions—schools, seminaries, academies, “female institutions,” colleges, and universities—running the whole gamut from correspondence schools in telegraphy to Harvard

College. Owing to early association with teaching, Ayer had resolved to do his part toward the spread of education. To this end, he made a special point, apparently from the very beginning, of encouraging schools and universities to advertise, and granted them special credit terms so that struggling institutions might pay him when they received tuition fees—the results of their advertising—in late autumn rather than at the time of publication in the spring and summer when they were usually short of cash. This policy has continued down to the present. (Hower 1949, p. 47)

Parenthetically, the fact that the pre-enrollment summer was apparently the normal student decision period suggests that most higher educational institutions were forced to operate in a buyers' market.

Hower's book (1949, p. 589-593) contains the distribution of billings across commodities for a number of years. The commodity distributions were condensed, and the results for the years 1877, 1900, 1921, 1925, and 1930 are shown in Table 2. Notice that colleges and universities contributed a sizable portion of agency revenue: 4.2% (ranked 8th) in 1877; 5% (ranked 5th) in 1900; 5.5% (ranked 6th) in 1921, 3.4% (ranked 11th) in 1925; and 1.5% (ranked 13th) in 1930. The decline in percentage and ranking in 1925 and 1930 does not imply a lessening of the importance of this revenue source. Because total revenue was increasing rapidly over the time period, the rankings and percentages of college advertising obscure the fact that educational revenue rose from about \$5,500 in 1877 to about \$570,000 in 1930. The volume of college and school revenue was sufficiently large that N. W. Ayer & Son instituted a separate department for educational advertising (Hower 1949, p. 209).

Magazines and Newspapers

Magazines and newspapers played a role in the promotion of educational institutions. Newspaper editors often informed university personnel in writing of their eagerness to publish college-related articles (Cutlip 1970). As a matter of interest to its readers, *Ladies Home Journal* in 1890 published articles on women's colleges, such as Radcliffe and Vassar (*Ladies Home Journal* 1890a).

table 2 turned

A number of magazines gave discounts to educational establishments since their presence in a publication was a “mark of quality circulation” (*Printers’ Ink* 1905b). It should be noted that *Printers’ Ink* was the leading advertising trade publication of the time, addressed not to the general public but to advertising agents, advertising managers, and the like. Magazines, especially religious magazines, frequently advertised in it and provided circulation figures and claimed to be “ideal” promotional vehicles for colleges (*Printers’ Ink* 1892a, 1892b, 1896).

Magazines actively consulted educational institutions on advertising. *Scribner’s Magazine* in a 1905 survey asked “the views of principals as to the best method of advertising such an institution” (*Printers’ Ink* 1905b). They mailed out 500 cards and received 450 responses, and the results indicated that principals considered alumni of critical importance in attracting new students. Advertising at least reminded alumni that the institution was still active (note the acknowledgement of an interaction between alumni word-of-mouth and recruitment). The magazine also assigned an employee the task of supervising the follow-up efforts of an unnamed school in Massachusetts. As a result, the principal more aggressively responded to inquiries leading to “a profit upon the whole sixteen years expenditure” (*Printers’ Ink* 1905b, p. 19).

Another example of research was a 1932 survey of university president’s attitudes to college publicity (Elliot 1932). About 500 questionnaires were mailed to colleges of more than 250 students and 237 responses were returned. Among college presidents, 64% felt publicity was essential (just 2% thought it unnecessary), 93% felt that colleges should be aggressive regarding publicity, and 66% felt that publicity activities should be centralized in a single department (size permitting). Other findings were that presidents felt athletics were overemphasized, newspapers were the most important media vehicle, followed by alumni magazines, and that good will was the most important objective of publicity.

A content analysis of 100 metropolitan newspapers for the month of May 1931 revealed that 35,341 college news items were published representing about 3% of all newspaper space (Marts 1932). Of the “college” space, sports articles appeared most often (39%), while fund-raising campaign and gift articles appeared least often

(0.40%), the latter probably reflective of newspaper editors not wanting to favor any one given college. The results are consistent with Elliot's (1932) finding of college presidents belief in the over-emphasis of athletics.

A six-year study was undertaken by Northwestern University exploring advertising effectiveness (McJohnston 1916). The research reported on the effectiveness of copy, media (as a function of cost per inquiry), and timing of advertisement placement (i.e., by month). The research was an outgrowth of the "business-like" approach that Northwestern took to attracting new students. The advertising budget "compares favorably with the average amount appropriated for national advertising campaigns among business concerns of medium size." The university retained an advertising agency and employed a "promotion secretary." Amid objections from some faculty members, the campaign was specifically designed to "help increase the total number of people who get a university education" (McJohnston 1916, p. 82).

Alumni and the General Population

Alumni, parents of students, government officials, and the general population were said to form a college's publics (Titus 1935). Parenthetically, we note the omission of students themselves from the list. If purposeful rather than accidental, the omission would suggest that half a century ago, the locus of family decision-making authority was different from what it is today.

Distinct appeals have been launched toward the publics. A good deal of publicity and promotion was aimed at attracting students. Targeting alumni (and others of the general population) can serve two ends: the recruitment of new students and fund raising. Collegiate funding appears to have a long history (Cutlip 1970, 1971). A few examples are in order. A portion of the June 1883 Commencement speech delivered to Columbia alumni asked for pledge money and pledge cards from Yale University (WSC, Box 3). An 1877 brochure distributed by Oberion College stressed the need for endowment funds and the Colby University 1891-1892 yearbook asked for money (WSC, Box 2). Alfred University commemorated its centennial in 1935 by launching a \$1 million campaign (WSC, Box 3). Efforts can be traced to before the Civil War. Albert Barnes

delivered a speech in Newark, N.J. in 1845 and again in Philadelphia in 1846 entitled "Theological School. Plea in Behalf of Western Colleges. A Discourse Delivered Before the Society for Promoting Collegiate and Theological Education at the West" (WSC, Box 17).

A shift in funding occurred toward the end of the nineteenth century with the emergence of mega-benefactors. In 1873, Johns Hopkins gave \$7 million to found the Johns Hopkins University. John D. Rockefeller founded the University of Chicago with \$10 million in 1891. Duke University was established with a trust fund valued at \$100 million in 1924. Boorstin (1973, p. 490) noted:

Just as Henry VIII devoted his takings from the confiscated monasteries to the founding of Trinity College, now, too, men of great wealth who wanted admission to the democratic heaven, or at least hoped for an honorary degree as absolution from their industrial sins, made munificent gifts for education cathedrals.

While Boorstin does have a flair for the melodramatic, there is evidence of fund raisers using "snob" appeal. Consider a 1930 fund-raising campaign of Oregon University (Barker 1930). The university hired J.H. Nash, a well-known west-coast printer, to create a "gift book" of artistic quality. No expense was spared as 90 distinguished guests were invited to a special banquet at which Nash was the guest of honor. Just 500 numbered copies of the "gift book" were printed, and every wealthy family in Oregon received one. The campaign was sufficient in scope to receive newspaper coverage. Two thousand elegant but "cheaper" versions of the gift book were published and distributed to Oregon-based lawyers and trust companies. The distribution of the "lower class" version suggests that different segments were targeted with different intensities of the same appeal. The long-standing techniques of allowing donors of different amounts to name buildings, classrooms, and facilities of different sizes illustrates a recognition of status as well as a means of objectifying an otherwise intangible gift.

The alumni and the general population also served as a basis for the recruitment of new students. If a student was interested in attending the University of Nebraska, for example, and the father

objected, then the university wrote to alumni in the locale asking them to visit the family to convince the father of the desirability of a university education (*Printers' Ink* 1905a). In a letter dated 1899, the president of Madison College (Hamilton, N.Y.) asked alumni for names of prospective students and also inquired about potential employment opportunities for graduating students (WSC, Box 2).

College Publicity and Promotion

Colleges established publicity boards in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Yale, Harvard, Columbia, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Nebraska, and the University of Michigan (Cutlip 1970, 1971). These institutions were quite aggressive in their actions. For example, the University of Nebraska mailed press releases to every daily newspaper in Nebraska, selected newspapers in neighboring states, and to a few in Chicago. In addition, students wrote stories for their local papers and were paid 25 cents for each story by the university (*Printers' Ink* 1905a).

Evidently, the University of Michigan's most important promotion was the University "News-Letter" (Elsworth 1899). The bi-monthly letter contained ready-to-publish press releases on scientific accomplishments and was circulated to some 1,650 publications. Like Nebraska, student accomplishments were sent to appropriate local newspapers. A desk calendar was mailed to the editors of Michigan-based newspapers, a 34-page booklet was mailed to prospective students, and a display was made each year that travelled to various high schools and private schools from which the university recruited. Other examples can be found in Cutlip (1970, 1971).

Colleges used booklets and calendars as promotional tools to attract students. *Ladies Home Journal* (1890a, 1890b) ran ads that offered promotional material from the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania and the Women's College of Baltimore. It is in brochures like these that references to product, place, and price can be found.

Consider the case of price. Valpariso University (Indiana) priced tuition, housing, and food below that of other universities. A room cost about one-fifth of the price at Yale price (\$0.40 versus \$2.90 per week) and food about one-third as much (\$1.88 versus \$4.94

per week) (Kennan 1908). In spite of not advertising (as of 1908) and not being well known as a consequence, the university boasted 5,000 students, supposedly only second to Harvard in terms of size. The low food prices were attributed to smart business practice. Food was purchased directly from farmers, thereby eliminating middlemen. Student labor was contracted out to farmers, and faculty supplemented their income by selling privately grown vegetables to the university. Bread was sliced thin, which increased the demand for bread and butter but decreased the demand for more expensive meat.

The democratization of curricula is implicitly observed in a 1891 Colby University Catalogue (WSC, Box 2). They added courses of specific interest to females, such as home economics courses. The catalogue also promoted the convenient *location* of the institute as well.

Cornell University published a brochure in which students were advised of which curriculum they should choose. In this brochure, President White states "During many years I have been receiving letters from parents asking, 'To what profession and how shall I educate my children?'" (1884, p. 5). The brochure described a number of professions, their educational requirements, and how Cornell might help the student meet the requirements.

CONCLUSION

This research note briefly examined the history of the higher educational institutions and the marketing thereof. The history of marketing of higher educational institutions has lagged the history of general marketing in the U.S. in an interesting way. Industry typically faced a buyers' market (supply exceeding demand at prevailing prices) until 1940, with a brief exception during World War I (Hotchkiss 1938). The 1940s were radically different due to World War II and its reconstruction aftermath, and vendors were typically able or required to allocate supplies among clamoring would-be customers. The long hiatus of the selling effort made the return to normal marketing in the 1960s appear as a revolutionary development to many ahistorical observers.

For colleges and universities, most of the 1940s were a period of

austerity when much of the normal enrollment was drawn into military service or accepted high-paying warwork jobs. Many institutions survived only through great adaptiveness in undertaking contractual military and industrial training programs (a history of what schools and faculties found they could teach, or at least tried to teach, during those years would make interesting reading). Late in the 1940s and during the subsequent two decades, the college market was subjected to the conflicting impacts of subsidization of veterans' enrollment (GI Bill), Korean War draft and veteran's enrollment, increased college participation rate for the appropriate age group (see Table 1), shifts in the size of the adolescent population, competition from college facilities built to meet peak demands, and the Vietnam War draft with its educational deferments and veteran's enrollments. However, it was the great Baby Boom population upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s, plus the increased participation rate that gave colleges and universities a boost that has only begun to weaken in the past decade. Thus the need for aggressive recruitment to obtain students or the "most desirable" students (however defined), even while students are aggressively campaigning for admission to preferred institutions is again seen as revolutionary. Some promotion, however, is needed because students, unlike customers, are not profit centers. Tuition revenue almost always must be supplemented by other revenues that, under the rule of rising aspirations, can never quite match an institution's dreams.

Cyclical, secular, and other variations in the macro and micro relationships of institutional supply and demand naturally affected the academic use of business tools. That factor, however, operated within the context of the democratization spirit and a number of other factors that were associated with it. Those included American optimism; belief in progress; "boosterism"; a tendency to believe that bigger is better; and particularly throughout broad sectors of the population (including many educational administrators), a high receptivity for business methods. Undoubtedly there were many articulate faculty members who wanted to hold to ideals of a landed aristocracy, but they were Canutes railing against a democratic tide.

NOTE

1. WSC refers to the Warsaw Collection of American Business Ephemera, Collection 60, Center for Advertising History, Center for Archival Research, National Museum for American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Citation is to SC-School and College holdings and box number.

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